

Finding Receptive Souls and Teaching Them Directly (II)

A believer in the United States reported that after giving “Anna’s presentation” to her brother-in-law, he said that “if he had heard this presentation two or three years ago when he first heard of the Faith, it would have saved him a lot of time and hunting around for information. He liked how it covered many topics and helped things fit together.” Her brother-in-law declared his faith in Bahá’u’lláh a few days later. Over the past few months this response has been repeated in countless settings—urban and rural, in Bahá’í centers or in home visits—across five continents. And with very similar results. Because the experience in the area of direct teaching is so rich and the learning is increasing so rapidly, this issue of the newsletter continues the theme of direct teaching. The efforts of the friends to align their teaching approaches with the skills acquired in the institute courses continue to yield outstanding results.

The accounts presented in this issue demonstrate the impact of *collective endeavors* in direct teaching. A number of them also report the success of utilizing an outside resource person who helps in guiding and organizing a teaching project. Some of the projects focus on teaching seekers who are participating in core activities, often along with their friends and family members, through organized home visits; other projects are based on systematic efforts to establish children’s and junior youth activities as an avenue for reaching other family members; and some teaching projects undertake campaigns to contact new souls who live in neighborhoods which the cluster agencies deem to be fertile ground. But all of these projects are effective when “employing direct teaching methods that draw on the Writings to offer the message in a manner both forthcoming and inviting.”

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Children’s classes and junior youth groups: *These two core activities, once established, provide unlimited opportunities for reaching the parents and neighbors of the youngsters and are rapidly proving to be one of the most effective portals for entry by troops.*

Myanmar

In the **Yangon** cluster, the expansion phase of its seventh cycle involved 19 friends who began visiting selected communities in teams. They focused on teaching the parents of the participants of the junior youth groups and the children’s classes as well as their personal friends. A report from the Counsellor and the Auxiliary Board member states:

We had some remarkable experiences and learning in this campaign about approaching the parents, using Anna’s presentation with drawings, forming teams, inviting seekers and about enrollment. Approaching the parents of children in our classes was easier. One mother said, “Every day I used to hear foul language and quarrelling in my neighbourhood. For today, I have heard peaceful teachings and as soon as I heard them my heart felt calm and peaceful.”

A total of 34 individuals accepted Bahá’u’lláh during the expansion phase, most of whom were parents of children and junior youth in the Bahá’í classes. The cycle ended with 44 new believers!

United States

In the **San Diego, California** cluster the establishment of a junior youth group and children's classes created a receptive environment for a direct teaching project.

We were in our fourth cycle of growth and after analyzing our resources, having successfully conducted home visits to our friends, families, neighbors and co-workers, we realized it was time to reach out to a receptive population. How did we choose? Everyone is so receptive in our cluster! We chose a neighborhood that had the strongest teaching teams surrounding it that could provide a powerful pool of human resources. In addition, we had launched a junior youth group two weeks prior to our reflection gathering and had an overwhelming response by the junior youth of City Heights.

We wanted to interweave all four core activities so we decided to launch neighborhood children's classes so that the younger siblings of these junior youth would also receive spiritual education. Naturally we could then invite the parents to Ruhi 1 and devotionals. We were excited!

As it turns out, City Heights is perhaps the most diverse neighborhood in the cluster with over 35 languages being spoken. Now it was time to go to their homes. Our approach was to introduce the Faith by inviting family members to the children's classes and junior youth groups that we were offering.

After ardent prayers and devotions, ten teams of two went out to the homes on six streets surrounding the park and what a wonderful experience it was! We had no idea how warmly we would be welcomed. "This is what we have needed in our community," said one lady. "I didn't even have to leave my home—God sent you straight to my door! Thank you for coming to my home," said another man.

The results of the teaching project were numerous: two enrollments, five new children's classes with 25 neighborhood children, one junior youth group, two Ruhi Institute Book 1 study circles in Spanish, and eight devotional meetings, four of them in the homes of seekers!

In the **Phoenix, Arizona** cluster seeds of success were sown by the Local Spiritual Assembly of Phoenix when it made the decision to decentralize the area-wide children's school and focus on neighborhood classes. To ensure the success of the neighborhood approach, an effort was made to take the prospective teachers of children through Book 3 and to establish teaching teams to support the class teachers by making systematic home visits to participating families, which in turn led to a multiplication of devotional gatherings. All of this activity naturally created bonds of friendship and a stronger sense of community. The friends in the cluster began to develop a true outward-looking orientation, to look for receptivity among all those with whom they had contact.

The activities in neighborhoods proved to be a solid foundation for the teaching efforts during the expansion phase of the intensive program of growth that was launched in December 2007. Four neighborhoods were selected and teaching teams were dispatched to carry out home visits using "Anna's presentation" with people who had already shown interest in the Faith, as well as with others. The key members of the teams were well trained in the direct teaching approach, having participated in an active refresher training some weeks earlier. The teams were also outfitted with printed versions of "Anna's presentation," declaration and child registration cards, packets with maps and materials, prayer cards, invitations to devotionals and children's classes, forms for recording each visit, and names and addresses of potential contacts.

The teams were deployed into the field immediately following an inspirational and energizing cluster reflection gathering. That first day the teams approached 203 homes. Of the 104 people who opened their doors, 70 were receptive toward the teams. There were four declarations on that first day! By the conclusion of the intensive teaching period, there had been 34 declarations of adults and youth and the registration of 34 children and junior youth. More than one-third of the declarants were parents of children in Bahá'í classes.

***Resource persons:** The deployment of outside resource persons for expansion who assist the friends in clusters to organize direct teaching endeavors has had a catalytic effect on the teaching work in a wide range of clusters. They not only give an impetus to growth but help build capacity in the local friends to advance the process of entry by troops with greater confidence and vigor.*

Bangladesh

The **Dhaka** cluster has had an intensive program of growth since early 2005, but the efforts of the friends were not garnering results commensurate with the potential of the cluster. Enrollments, an important tangible measure of success, had been steady but relatively few, despite a receptive general population. A resource person, who was an Auxiliary Board member from Pakistan, was invited to assist with the expansion phase of the seventh cycle of the growth program in November 2007. This experienced teacher worked with a small number of teaching teams and assisted them in making their plans and in practicing their presentations. He was able to offer insights and encouragement to stimulate the local believers to carry out direct teaching more effectively, thereby giving a boost to the intensity and quality of their efforts.

The first part of their expansion phase was a 10-day teaching effort that involved 16 teachers and resulted in 26 enrollments—a great improvement over previous cycles of the intensive program of growth which in 2006 had averaged four new believers per cycle. During this period, the participants learned the important lesson that if they responded to the call to teach and persevered, their efforts would be confirmed. They also discovered that by aligning their teaching methods with the approaches learned in the institute courses, they achieved far better results.

Building on the success of the first ten days, a five-day campaign was carried out, this time with 31 participants. The activities of the second effort were decentralized to the neighborhood level, which produced more enthusiasm and consequently more enrollments. During these five days, another 58 adults and youth declared and 15 children and junior youth were added to the community. Those taught came from both Muslim and Hindu backgrounds. Most of the new believers were people of capacity, especially university students. Six mothers of children who had been attending Bahá'í children's classes embraced the Faith. Eight relatives of two believers who had never before tried to teach others in their household now enrolled in the Faith. It was discovered that the only reason these relatives had never become believers before was because no one had ever invited them!

Central African Republic

The Bahá'ís in the **Bangui** cluster began the ninth cycle of their intensive program of growth with anticipation. A resource person from the Lubumbashi cluster in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was coming to assist with their upcoming expansion phase. Although the initial cycles of their growth program had averaged 17 new believers, the last four cycles

had declined to only 6 declarations on average. The teaching work needed a boost! Electricity was in the air as the friends prepared for his visit—the cluster institutions met, updated their statistics, and organized for large participation at the reflection meeting.

The resource person from Lubumbashi traveled for seven days, taking two airplane flights, a difficult eight-hour trip by motorbike, and finally a canoe ride to reach Bangui. Wasting no time, he immediately met with the cluster agencies to review the situation of the cluster and to share experiences from his own cluster. Together they planned a teaching project for the outlying areas of the cluster, selecting neighborhoods and populations to focus on, consulting on the number of teams to be formed, discussing the budget and needed teaching materials, and setting goals for enrollments. Careful attention was paid to the daily timetable of each team and the responsibilities of the team coordinators. The resource person then accompanied the individual teams on a daily basis during the expansion phase, consulting regularly with their coordinators and the cluster agencies.

During the two-week expansion phase, 42 individuals embraced the Faith and declarations continued during the consolidation phase, for a final total of 72 new believers during the ninth cycle—12 times the average enrollments of the previous four cycles! Statements such as “This has never happened before in Bangui!” were heard as spirits ran high. The cluster agencies had to call forth all available resources to assist with the consolidation of so many new Bahá’ís. A large chart was made of the new believers which noted levels of literacy and other information so that each one could be scheduled for an appropriate activity or visit to integrate them into the Bahá’í community.

Three months later the teacher from Lubumbashi returned to Bangui for the beginning of the tenth cycle to ensure that preparations were going smoothly. Drawing upon what was learned in the previous cycle, the next was even better organized. Again, about 40 people entered the Faith during the expansion phase. The experience and inspiration brought by the resource person had changed the teaching work forever.

Tanzania

The believers in the **Nyaruyoba** cluster in rural Tanzania launched an intensive program of growth in October 2005. Even though many friends had steadily moved through the sequence of courses, the number of enrollments for the first four cycles was modest and clearly did not represent the cluster’s potential for growth. A resource person from the Tiriki West cluster in rural Kenya was asked to visit Nyaruyoba during its fifth cycle. He arrived three days before the planning and cluster reflection gathering and first visited some of the communities.

Having begun to familiarize himself with the area, the resource person and the cluster agencies together reviewed the cluster statistics and the results of previous cycles. After reviewing this information and the learning from past cycles, they

- identified challenges and explored new approaches to overcome them;
- identified potentially receptive populations;
- set goals based on a realistic assessment of the available human resources;
- tried to identify people with special talents, such as artistic ability, that could be put to good use in assisting the teaching work;
- decided upon the makeup of new teaching teams; and
- identified key individuals within the teams who could coordinate them in the field.

The planning session itself was a revelation to the local friends. With the help of the resource person, they realized that despite having taken 70 friends through the sequence of courses, very few had become active promoters of the processes of the Five Year Plan. Four teaching teams of five to seven members each were formed, and four areas of the cluster were chosen on which to focus the intensive teaching campaign.

Prepared and excited, the friends gathered at 6:00 in the morning the first day of the teaching campaign in order to say the Tablet of Ahmad and to receive the assignments for the teaching teams. As the day went on, they found the teaching album to be very helpful. The Kenyan friend encouraged and assisted the believers in teaching as well as in gathering information from the team coordinators. At the end of the fourth day there had been 57 enrollments! The goal was 65, based upon the level of resources available to consolidate the new believers.

On the sixth day the goal of 65 new believers was met, so the cluster agencies met urgently to discuss what to do. During the previous four cycles combined, there had been only 60 declarations. It was decided to stop the expansion phase and to immediately begin consolidation. A significant outcome was that most of the new believers were people of capacity—youth and schoolteachers. The resource person from Kenya is staying in touch with the cluster agencies and will return to assist in a later cycle.

Results from Recent Teaching Projects around the Globe

- **Azerbaijan.** The 13th cycle of the intensive program of growth in the **Baku** cluster resulted in over 200 new believers, including 165 junior youth who were enrolled in the spiritual empowerment program. Two notable characteristics of these efforts were the participation of junior youth Bahá'ís in the teaching work and the desire of many parents for their children to embrace the Faith even if they themselves did not feel ready to do so. Using the material from Book 6, the teaching teams presented the Faith to residents of high-rise buildings in three neighborhoods. Although strong opposition was experienced in the neighborhood of highest receptivity, making it difficult initially to begin consolidation activities, the friends have acted wisely and persevered in their efforts to win the trust of the families of new believers, as well as community leaders, through home visits. They now report a healthy rate of engagement in study circles, junior youth groups, and devotional meetings.
- **Bolivia.** A resource person from Colombia was sent to the **Cochabamba** cluster to assist with the “Reviving the Spirit of Teaching” project. The project was planned nationally for the purpose of training believers and cluster agencies from around the country in how to carry out a direct teaching campaign. The actual teaching during the project garnered 52 enrollments—well surpassing the goal of 35.
- **Côte d'Ivoire.** The expansion phase of the first intensive program of growth in Côte d'Ivoire, which was launched in the **Danané** cluster on 24 December 2007, was drawn to a close after just three days of concentrated teaching, following the enrollment of 76 new believers! The approach employed by the some 35 friends who participated in the direct teaching project focused on the use of an album based on “Anna’s presentation.” The consolidation phase began immediately with 53 new believers enrolled in Book 1 study circles, 24 classes formed for 161 children, 65 junior youth joining an already vibrant spiritual empowerment program, and 98 participants attending devotional meetings. The teaching work is also ongoing with 11 firesides attended by 70 seekers.

- **Dominican Republic.** Resource persons who participated in the highly successful direct teaching campaign in the **Santo Domingo** cluster not only assisted teaching teams during the project but also continued to meet with the teams and cluster coordinators following the expansion phase to guide their planning for prompt consolidation of the new believers. They also accompanied some of the teams during their initial deepening visits to the 100 new believers! By the end of the first week of the consolidation phase, there were an additional 11 enrollments.
- **France.** France has seen an impressive increase in enrollments over the past few months. Whereas in the six months from April through October 2007, 37 enrollments were reported nationally, recent figures show that since November 2007, there have been 50 new declarations. Of these, 46 have been in the priority clusters and 16 resulted from activities of the intensive program of growth in the **Créteil** cluster alone. The new believers in this cluster have started teaching vigorously, using a direct approach and inviting their friends into the Faith.
- **Thailand.** Two resource persons from Cambodia assisted the friends in the **Yasothon** cluster to revitalize their intensive program of growth through direct teaching using the presentation in Book 6 with the aid of a teaching flip chart. These resource persons accompanied local believers in approaching their friends, neighbors, and seekers attending core activities, an effort that resulted in 28 declarations! The learning from this major breakthrough for the Faith in Thailand was quickly transferred to other clusters by the Auxiliary Board member, leading to 7 and 6 declarations respectively in the **Bangkok** and **Chiangmai** clusters which, like Yasothon, had not experienced growth for many months.
- **United States.** In the **Colorado Springs** cluster in Colorado the cluster agencies carefully planned the Varqa Teaching Project that would launch the expansion phase of the first cycle of their intensive program of growth. Named in memory of the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, the direct teaching project focused on the neighborhood surrounding the local Bahá'í Center. If friends did not feel ready to join teaching teams, they were involved in numerous support tasks; a few elderly believers came to the Center daily just to pray for success. In the end, almost everyone got caught up in the excitement of the teaching work. By the fourth day there were so many seekers that it was decided to focus solely on follow-up. During the nine-day expansion phase, 10 souls embraced the Faith!
- **Virgin Islands.** Assisted by a resource person from the Dominican Republic, the friends in the **St. John/St. Thomas** cluster carried out a successful four-day direct teaching campaign that brought three adults, two junior youth, and one child into the Faith. This surpassed the level of enrollments in the previous 18 months. The campaign also instilled a deeper commitment to the Faith within a group of junior youth from the wider community who were already participating in Bahá'í junior youth activities.